

Stress Point Support

Tools to foster family connection, support your family's faith,
and promote mental wellness



“In our own day, dominated by stress and rapid technological advances, one of the most important tasks of families is to provide an education in hope.”

Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 275

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

The holidays—including the liturgical season of Advent and the leadup to Christmas and New Year’s—can be a time filled with both joy and stress for our families. We want to create and enjoy important traditions. We also want to foster a spirit of giving and emphasize the joy of Jesus.

At the same time, December is often filled with “extra” everything. School, parish, and family gatherings fill our weeks. School pressures may increase for older children as the semester ends. Family losses or financial pressures might be more on our minds. Our desire to create memories together may clash with time constraints.

So, if you are feeling stressed this Advent, you’re not alone. Eighty-nine percent of U.S. adults say the holidays are more stressful. And almost half of parents and caregivers (48%) say that most days their stress levels are “completely overwhelming.”

Stress Point Support activities can help empower your family to celebrate this season with joy alongside those stressors. The simple tips and activities provided can help your family create memories and traditions while being attentive to your spiritual, emotional, and mental wellbeing. Together, we can turn to the Lord and take to heart the promise of Christmas. God comes to dwell with us in Jesus Christ. He never abandons us. He is with us! And he draws us into love.

Please know of our prayers for you this Advent!

Your Friends at RCL Benziger

Advice for Self-Care

Tips for Adults



Parents and caregivers are often reminded to take care of themselves, but as responsibilities pile up, that can feel unrealistic. Caring for ourselves honors our dignity and shows our children that adults have genuine and important needs too. We can help build children's ability to cope with stress by modeling how we respond to busy seasons.

While these ideas can help all ages, choose one or two practices to focus on for your own sake. Even small ways we care for ourselves can have positive impacts on our health and our family.



Physical and Mental Health: Pay attention to what your physical and mental health need the most right now: Nutrition? More sleep? Exercise? Reaching out to talk to someone? Be mindful of balancing those needs.



Spirituality: Listen to the daily Gospel in Advent from usccb.org or use a prayer app to build a daily prayer practice in Advent. Or consider saying a decade of the Rosary while running errands or commuting before turning on music.



Community: Call a friend or family member regularly to check in. Complete seasonal tasks with a friend or neighbor. Volunteer for a shift at a food pantry or other charities.

Guidance by Age

Infants/ Toddlers	Primary Grades (K-3)	Intermediate Grades: (4-6)	Junior High: (7-8)
 Infants and toddlers sense both the excitement and stress of the season from the people around them.	 Enthusiasm for special times and holidays really kicks into gear. The spirit of this season is at its height for this age but can also be dysregulating.	 Children this age are caught between the wonder of the holidays and more logical reasoning.	 Preteens/early teens can better understand the meaning of the Nativity and the spirit of giving.
 The excitement of noisy and full events can be overstimulating. Since children this age depend on routine, focus on consistency where possible. Do not feel bad if you need to arrive at an event late or leave early to preserve the sleep routine!	 Waiting all of Advent for Christmas can be tough as children this age are still developing a sense of time. Expect a lot of when/why/where questions.	 They may be restless looking toward Christmas break. They are at a shifting point—they often want more independence and input but still find comfort in family traditions.	 They may also experience more academic or social pressures in December. They are still developing emotional awareness, so they may respond to stress with outbursts or by avoiding people. They might resist seasonal traditions more.
 - Pick one or two Advent or Christmas-themed children's books. Keep them on a low shelf. - Find a children's Nativity scene or crèche they can play with (and put in their mouths!)	 - Nativity-themed Advent calendars can help count down to Christmas. - Lighting an Advent wreath week to week can show the progression toward Christmas.	 - Give them a special task or specific role related to a special family tradition. - Start or end the day with an Advent-themed prayer. Breathe three times slowly. As you exhale, pray "Come, Lord Jesus."	 - Model emotional regulation for them. Share what you notice about your experience of this time of year. Invite their perspective. - You could shop for an Angel Tree item or complete a shift at a food pantry together to help them connect the season with the importance of loving our neighbors.

Family Advent Traditions



This season, we can focus on two words: **tradition** and **regulation**. **Traditions** create meaning and memory for kids and allow their minds to relax at the same time. Traditions also allow adult minds to rest by reducing decision fatigue. **Regulation** is the ability to manage emotions. Instead of trying to control or suppress our feelings and reactions, we try to acknowledge our emotions and respond appropriately.

Starting just one of these traditions may help members of your family regulate emotionally, nourish faith, and foster connection with each other.



Activity

“Candlelight” Dinner or Family Time: Turn off overhead lighting and other lamps as desired. If your family has a Christmas tree or other decorations with lights, turn those on. Light a candle or your Advent wreath. Put phones and devices in another room.

- Place: Family home
- Time Investment: As little as 10 minutes, as long as a few hours before bedtime.
- How Often: Weekly or daily—do what works for your family!
- Why: Low light in the evening helps calm our brains. It cues to our circadian rhythm that sleep is coming soon. Quality time spent with family builds bonds of trust and comfort.
- Level Up: Light a family Advent wreath, and say a short prayer together while the lights are low. Pray the Sign of the Cross, and say together “Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay.” Sit in silence looking at the candles for two minutes. Then close with an Our Father.



Activity

Singing Together: Advent and Christmas songs and hymns are memorable and often singable! Choose a song as a family, and learn one or two verses to sing together. If singing without music feels awkward, you can pick a recorded version you like and hum or sing along instead.

- Place: The family home or car
- Time Investment: 5-10 minutes
- How Often: Weekly, two to three times a week, or daily—do what works for your family!
- Why: Singing (or humming) is a proven stress reducer. It stimulates the vagus nerve which calms our bodies and nervous systems. It also releases relaxing and bonding hormones like oxytocin and dopamine while lowering cortisol (the stress hormone).
- Level Up: Print out the lyrics of the hymn(s) you chose, and decorate the pages with Advent or Christmas drawings and stickers. Or choose one calmer hymn/song and one higher-energy hymn/song and alternate singing them.
- Song Ideas:
Advent: O Come, O Come Emmanuel; People Look East; Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.
Christmas: O Little Town of Bethlehem; O Come, All Ye Faithful; Away in a Manger;
Go Tell it on the Mountain.



Activity

Building the Manger with Kindness: Do you have a family Nativity scene? Gather yellow strips of paper or pieces of straw in a small basket to help prepare the stable or manger for baby Jesus. Place the basket near the Nativity scene. Once a week, gather as a family and slowly read aloud the account of the Nativity from Luke 2:1-20.

After you read, ask each person to share something for which he or she is grateful. Or family members can note an act of kindness they noticed from another family member. Each person can add a piece of paper or straw to the stable or manger after speaking.

- Place: The family home
- Time Investment: 15-20 minutes
- How Often: Once a week
- Why: The weekly tradition builds bonds of connection in your family. Noting acts of kindness from others promotes healthy acknowledgement and appreciation from family members. Gratitude practices can lower cortisol and break negative thought patterns while fostering joy, hope, and connection. Connecting kindness to Jesus' birth helps children and parents realize what God has done out of love for us.

¹ <https://www.pakeys.org/oct25-seasonalstress/>. Accessed 10.8.2025.

² American Psychological Association (2023, November). Infographic: Stress of parents compared to other adults. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2023/infographics/infographicparents-other-adults>

³ Infographic from the American Psychological Association (APA, 2023) found on <https://www.pakeys.org/oct25-seasonalstress/>. Originally found on <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2023/infographics/infographic-parents-other-adults>. Accessed 10.8.2025.